

## Article

# Conceptualizing New Materialism in Geographical Studies of the Rural Realm

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**Abstract:** Geographic analysis in rural areas has been dominated in recent decades by socio-economic and socio-political perspectives. The new materialism can constitute a way of progress in rural geographical studies that involve the material and the human in the form of hybrid experiences. Materiality can be expressed in three ways: (1) the surface matter that corresponds to the traditional elements of the material rural space, (2) the materiality that would be associated with a joint and undifferentiated vision of human artefacts in a village, mainly the set of rural houses and (3) the experimental materiality that has an individual dimension, the result of the multiple processes of destruction, revival and reconstruction that simultaneously happen in one place. The experimental materiality is of the most interest for geographic analysis since it is where the materiality of the rural house and the individual are hybridized in the process of recovery of the traditional rural house. In the process of recovery of materialities, binary oppositions built in the rigid framework of modernity can be dissolved and established fluid postmodern alternatives co-produced between people and materiality. The new materialism in rural geography can be an alternative path that allows analyzing heterogeneous realities in a hybrid way and contributing in a practical context to the development of new rural policies.

**Keywords:** new materialism; past; heritage; countryside; rural geography; human geography



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## 1. Introduction

Rural spaces have always been spaces of change and interaction between various environmental, socio-economic and cultural dimensions, but recently these restructuring processes are characterized by their intensity and persistence in all their dimensions, to the point of transforming rural life.

The geographical dynamics of rural spaces have been dominated in the last three decades by analytical approaches based on socioeconomic or sociocultural dimensions and a position in the present that is detached from the geo-historical trajectories of the past. The relative absence of the past and a passive vision towards materiality has had a notable continuity, both in the great interpretations of political economy and in sociocultural studies based on minor theory. Recently approaches that try to grant a global dimension to a rural category, with multiple spatial manifestations, also appear far from materiality and from the past [1]. The town has been a place of the experiment for rural studies [2], but its materiality appears diffuse and even lost. The local experiments of rural studies are fundamentally of a social nature and generally immaterial values associated with the rural idyll (tranquility, distance, knowledge) were attributed to the place of residence, which contributed to the process of social change. The locality is a particular location in space, but its value is fundamental the unique community of people [3]. This caution regarding materiality may be the response to the danger of a return to the descriptivism of regional geography dominated by landscape forms [4]. Furthermore, multiple dual or binary positions, which characterize a rigid vision of space, dominate the interpretation of the rural past opposite to the urban past category [5].

Approaches to rural change processes in rural geography have usually had a social dimension, with two sides: the loss of traditional populations and the arrival of new (ex) urban populations and the study of social conflicts in the place between local people and newcomers. The sociocultural turn has been remarkably successful in rural geography and has dominated geographical production in rural spaces in the last three decades [6], but this sociocultural turn has usually been based on the world of the ‘others’ humans, projecting his research on social groups usually on the margins of rural society and has paid little attention to the non-human world, until the emergence of animal geographies [7]. In this context, the world of other rural materialism and their past has been a relatively obscure topic in rural geographic research.

In this way, the purpose of this theoretical contribution is to (re)locate the new materialism in the context of geographical analyzes of the multiple processes of rural change. If the traditional materiality in rural geographical studies was based on the description of the landscape, the new rural materialism is framed in the more-than-human-geographies and suggests a hybrid and inclusive character that includes the daily experience of people (in their social and individual dimension) in the life of artifacts [8]. The path towards the new materialism in rural geography has three main phases, one dominated by traditional materiality until the 1980s, another path of transition founded on analytical socio-cultural or economic-political rural geography, between the years 1980s to 2010s. In the 2010s it is possible to situate the advance towards new materialism, based on the generalization of the more-than-human perspective in rural geographical studies. The new materialism takes life by being integrated with the daily experience of people in a continuous relationship of balance or mutual influence or interaction between people/individuals and artifacts. Consequently, it must also be a materiality that also integrates the past as an analytical key to study the new spatial processes of the present. The emergence of new materialism coincides with the development of other more inclusive concepts in the social sciences such as territorial capital applied to planning.

The essentially theoretical dimension of this contribution based on academic orientations of human geography that come from post-structuralism and the more-than-human-geography approach is structured in three parts: (1) the process of re-materialization of rural geography and its conceptual differences with the materiality of traditional geography; (2) the analytical styles of the past and heritage in the context of new materialism; (3) the role of the new experimental materialism based in the process of recovering traditional houses in contraposition with the old and lost materialism of the countryside. The selection of the traditional rural houses is due to the fact that it is a micro meeting place between histories of people and histories of materials.

## 2. (Re)Materialized Geographical Rural Studies

The return to materiality in human geography aims to grant ‘analytical significance of concrete differences in the material world and the way these enable and constrain the social relations’ [9] (p. 21). Materiality gives new relevance to the tangible world in the social construction of reality and analyzes the surface as a commodity. As Murdoch [10] (p. 334) suggests, ‘this approach sees modifications in both the social and the material realms’. Regardless of the opportunity for material return in human geography [4], looking back at material past in the rural world may constitute an opportunity to establish new lines of work in a current ‘circular’ rural geography based fundamentally on the analysis of the present [11], first from the perspective of political economy and then from a sociocultural perspective. This orientation based on new materialism is very interesting to reinterpret new uses or encounters with rural objects and environments, associated with renovated materialities of the lived bodies. This human-material link is established mainly through the rural house as loss and recovers new material space of encounter.

In most traditional geography, a notable dimension was granted to the description of the elements of the landscape. The prolonged and fruitful period of more analytical rural geography fuels misgivings about a return to rural geographical studies more grounded in

materiality, suspicions that have also been raised even for the whole of human geography due to a possible return to descriptivism and even to the rigid binary positions typical of an absolute vision of space [4]. Granting more relevance to the material world can rescue forgotten areas of work that suggest a renewed progress in the analytical framework of heterogeneous realities found in the place. This can be produced through experience (individual and social) in processes of decline and recovery of materiality that accompanies all processes of change and transformation in rural areas. Halfacree [12] argues that materiality is associated in rural geography with elements such as extensive land use, small settlement and community identity. However, spatial materiality does not strictly have value in itself. Materiality acquires value by interacting with social identity in everyday practice. Materiality and social representation coexist and interrelate in the practice of a spatial context (the locality) at a specific time [12]. The development of this argument in rural studies has granted meaning value (in the analysis of rurality) to the sociocultural dimension above the material context that has had a secondary consideration. The door opened to the insertion of materiality by Halfacree [12] has not been taken up firmly enough in recent thought of rural (geographical) studies. Woods [13] systematizes in three to rematerialize trends in rural geographical studies: first, founded on the material and discursive conditions linked with the geographical context of rural localities, but this tendency is associated with the renewal study of the others and the new marginality in the village; second, vinculated with efforts to statistically define rurality and categorize the rural space, a quantitative perspective based on numbers not in object or materialities that never disappeared from rural studies; and, third conceptualize the rural as a hybrid and networked space co-constituted by human and non-human actants [13] (p. 852), but this point of view impregnate a large number of rural geographical studies in the last decade, as opposed to rigid and binary geography, in multiple situations and has acquired relief with the emergence of animal geographies.

In the geographical tradition, there have been some valuable contributions that have included materiality and the past as the object of their analysis, such as the work of Wheeler [14] in her study on old mining towns, where she suggests that the 'landscape thus emerged from the research as part of how the place's history is remembered' [14] (p. 31). Vestiges of the past are incorporated into the personal and social memory of the community in form of a renewed notion of rural idyll or nostalgia. Recently, some works about geographical rural social change suggest the concept of a 'lived landscape', which emphasizes the interaction of the human and more-than-human with the performance of everyday life activities and their affective relevance [15].

In the context of wider rural studies, Carolan [16] suggests that the countryside is more than a discursive construct and that it is necessary to incorporate the issues of embodiment. In the case of biotechnology patents, Carolan [17] indicates how patent law contributes to creating biological fluid objects. The bridging role of symbolic value between human and material resources in framing cooperative development has also been insisted [18]. In this trend, it is also possible to highlight the contribution of Bryant and Higgins [19] on security and cultural scripts in smart farming technology implementation. From the perspective of political ecology and economic geography, it is possible to quote the contributions of Bridge [20] (p. 1), on the 'natural resources as a potent social category for designating parts of the non-human world to which value is attached'.

Putting the new materialism in the first place [21], can constitute an alternative study path to research focused on emerging social processes where locality/place appeared as a simple stage or a surface in the shadow, without its own value and malleable by socio-economic transformations. However, materiality is relevant in the process of social change since it leads to the re-emergence of some places and not others due to the predilection of the new urban social groups in the selection of the rural place to live [22]. In this context, the rural house as the particular set of buildings in a place and the rural houses as singular individuals in a place, play an important role in the micro-spatial reconfiguration of the new social composition of a community or locality. The gentrification processes associated with

the new materialisms can be exclusively based on the high newcomers' class or alternative when they are linked to low or popular processes of gentrification. However, incorporating rural materiality is also incorporating the past. Most of the rural houses are traditional and most of the space is dominated by traditional activities. It's just about actively embedding the past in contemporary rural change processes.

This is produced through a double human and non-human dialectic that is amalgamated in everyday material experimentality. There is an assumption based on 'speaking objects' as inanimate narrators and an extension of humans through narrative voices by generating a projection of human experience onto objects that produces human-buildings hybrids. The emergence and recovery of past material is carried out through co-production -human and material- in the present. The new rural materialisms do not have stable properties, so rural populations can create, maintain or modify the material artifact [23,24]. Artifacts are volatile pieces in heterogeneous material networks [25]. In any case, it is possible to accept different styles in the generation of new experimental materialism.

### 3. Styles of the Past and the Heritage in the Present of Rural Studies and Spaces

The (re)encounter with the (re)turn material can have many directions [25], since each materiality encloses different temporalities and spatialities. Matter is a contested question and can describe different paths according to the experience of power relations in a topographical place. In this sense, it is possible to establish diverse roads or options for the emergence of the past and heritage in the process of reconstructing rural realities [26,27].

In this perspective heritage is a scalar spatial phenomenon where the global ideal of management and particular interests of conservation in rural communities meet [28,29]. However, as Rhodes [30] suggests, there are few studies that connect individual materiality with the production of national identities from a scalar perspective. Human activities usually take the form of concrete interactions in time-space [31], with special significance in the cultural settings of small rural places. The small human settlements are graduations in between the social/nature binary relation and constitute hybrid forms of heterogeneous realities (materials) [32]. There would be three levels of hybridization: the individual, co-fabricated between more than human bodies and lively environment; the people, the co-production of human-material hybrid; the everyday, based on the subjectivity and the experience [24]. As Murdoch show [10] (p. 322) 'heterogeneous associations which seamlessly the social and the material can account for the emergence of micro or local spaces. Ultimately, there would be as many materialities as individuals, in the form of effective materialism [25] or material imaginations [33]. However, all (material) differences are driven by the individual, but they are not individual or unique. The differences are only ordered on the condition of having multiple networks of continuity of similarities [34]. How do material objects impact the social composition of a locality? Putting materiality first. For example, the morphological characteristics of a village and its own size may attract –or not- a socioeconomic type of population or doing research on the history of traditional rural houses and their successive inhabitants, which shows their vital materiality in the analytical path of the human experience of things to things themselves. With this putting rural materiality first strategy it is possible to find multiple differentiated countrysides, even in the same micro-place.

The management of the past can become a key point of coincidence between the topographical politics of planning and the topological politics of planning [10]. This orientation can contribute to developing policies to shape trajectories of spatial development over time. In this framework, the concept of dwelling can be positioned as a hinge between the topological relations and the topographies of place [35] and is remarkably useful for the analysis of the rural re-materialization processes associated with the traditional house. Rural dwellings are a staple of the traditional (cultural) geography in 1990 in the new materialism. Mainly through the rural house, the new materialism has been introduced in recent rural geographical studies, with different perspectives: the representation of the rural house [36], the recovery of the rural house as a material process [23], resettlement

processes in the context of rural restructuring dynamics [37] and the emergence of new modern artifacts in traditional rural architecture contexts [38]. The scalar selectivity of politics of recovery can drive the process of new purification of rural places through the reconstruction of rural houses. In definite, the process of recovering traditional rural materiality can reinforce the internal and external qualities of place [39].

How this can be extended and made more useful and dynamic through a different understanding of materiality? This would be a global process that affects countries of the global North [36], as well as the global South [23] with different rhythms and characteristics of each space. Within the framework of the global rural tendencies, it is possible to argue the existence of regional differences in new materialities resulting from the combination of several processes: (1) cultural differences; (2) differences in socioeconomic processes of change; (3) building material differential. This last characteristic refers to essential materiality that oscillates between robust and ephemeral, but which is very relevant in the persistence of the traditional rural house and in its recovery process. The life of a rural house is conditioned by its intrinsic materiality. Traditional architecture has a function attached to socioeconomic life and the new materialism of rural houses means experimenting and recreating the old condition of rurality in the reconstruction with a new residential or tourist functionality. In other words, traditional architecture express cultural traditions; the new matter rematerializes this culture through reconstruction processes, which incorporates new (urban) standards of habitability and hygiene.

There are two types of heritage: (1) Individual heritage: a particular material heritage that collects multiple experiences of the family house in the past and experiences of the present styles of recovering the past. The recovery styles of the past have different orientations in a locality that reflect an individual heterogeneity of hybrid material-human and constitute an element of distinction. They are new moral building spaces of rural everyday life. (2) Public is heritage associated mainly with emblematic local buildings (church, town hall, emblematic historical monuments) and public initiatives to recover public spaces, a new reflection of the spaces of power.

Private initiatives are regulated by the public policy of recovery and can give rise to emblematic uses in the form of historical complexes of private-public buildings in certain localities. Private heritage shapes moral spaces of everyday life and multiple biographies of popular materialities, while public heritage suggests biographies of memorial cultural landscapes of the place. The combination of these two non-human narratives of place generates differentiated styles of management in the past. The heterogeneity of hybrid imagined spaces suggests multiple associations between materialities and the human (social) world. Materiality would also be combined vertically, relating different juxtaposed materialities [40].

However, the process of loss and recovery also affects the economic and professional heritage, such as rural routes, terraces, dovecots and other agricultural constructions (haystacks, shelters). This would be an intermediate category between public and private, which influences its particular loss and recovery processes, usually with its own time. A good example is the revitalization of traditional rural routes, such as recreation and hiking spaces [41], where new experimental materiality can be found on top of a traditional public space.

Heritage is a present-centered process [42,43]. However, usually, it is possible to observe the different rhythm between recovering the village (mainly houses) and (un)recovering the immediate rural environment (loss of the orchards, loss of the elements of traditional countryside), in response to their functional breakdown in the process of rural change. In the present time, there exist differentiated and contrasted visions of rural change based on the combination of old and new materialities. In this line, it is possible to make plural histories of rural change based on recovering materialities: rural houses and emblematic artifacts and landscapes.



#### 4. Place and Village Materialities

In the rural geography with an analytical political economy orientation, locality appeared as an undifferentiated material space where the global socioeconomic processes that lead to the processes of change and local restructuring were manifested. The originality of the process of change was expressed in each place by the specific combination of global or local factors. In this topological locality, the general manifested itself in the particular [2]. The town was a meeting point that housed a microcosm of social relationships. That is why it was always necessary to carefully choose the locality of study, so that it constitutes a representative case. Undifferentiated materiality in rural studies avoided the risks of going backwards. To reincorporate place and village materialities with an analytical dimension of rural studies, a new strategy of study is needed, in the theoretical context of poststructuralist geographies of heterogeneous associations with deleuzian inspiration [10,44]. In this sense, it would be possible to distinguish between three planes in the insertion of the new materialism in rural areas: the surface or matter locality dominated by physical structures; materiality or artefacts, materiality associated with human activity in an undifferentiated locality; experimental/individual materiality associated with vital/vibrant materialities [45].

(1) The surface matter corresponds to the traditional elements of material rural space: large land uses, dominated by agriculture, a small rural settlement and a known community [12,46]. These elements have usually been used to demarcate the rural space from the urban space. They usually constitute the ‘risk’ of going backwards in geographical (rural) studies.

(2) Materiality would be associated with a joint and undifferentiated vision of the human artifacts in a village, mainly the set of rural houses. This human materiality would be highly influenced by the past and contributes decisively to the originality and internal and external differentiation of the place. The internal differentiation resides in two sets of materialities: rural houses and other human artefacts essentially linked to traditional agrarian activity. It is an accumulated materiality in the form of a historical process in a specific place and contributes to making the (material) scene more complex. There would be an external differentiation with respect to other places based on the singular material originality of the past, which would endow the place with a specific value. This differential originality is a component in the selective processes of recolonization and recovery of some places with respect to others. For example, towns officially recognized as historic sites are a place of attraction for new urban populations. It also reflects a transition towards the analysis of the reconstruction process of rural heritage places [27].

In the context of the process of reconstitution of collective materiality, there is a transition from a known community to a relational or extra-local community where regional or even national interests appear, based on the emblematic value of the site. The village suggests multiple differences in the past, but only selected images and associations persist until the present [46,47]. It is even possible to use the new heritage as inventions to attract new economic activities mainly associated with tourist or recreational events. This is the case of the medieval fairs that involve the whole of the local population in towns that recreate this era in its new materialism.

(3) The experimental materiality has an individual dimension, the result of the multiple processes of destruction, revival and reconstruction of rural houses that occur simultaneously in a place. Is the intimate relation between particular artifacts with an individual renewed? A research strategy is the successive processes of assemblage [48] and disassembly between consecutive individuals/owners in the history of a traditional rural house [49]. These processes encompass individual situations of loss and conflict of historical traditional heritage. There are multiple individual pasts that give heterogeneity to the collective past of the rural community. Each separate individual’s histories make his own moral past [46]. The moral history of a rural community suggests a continuous kind of physical or experimental renewal. As Deleuze [50] (p. 99) suggests, ‘the idea of space is only the idea of visible or tangible points distributed in a certain order. Space is discovered in

the arrangement of visible and tangible objects as time is the perceptible succession of changing objects.

Conceptualizing experimental materiality as meaning, symbol or representation rather than as an artefact or object suggests partial and successive social conflicts for different positions, interests and views of individuals or social groups [28]. Individual experience is selective [50]. In this conceptual context heritage becomes a commodity object and subject and it is possible the coexistence and conflict between different individual positions in the present. The new uses of individual rural heritage are a specific source of contestation in place. The reinterpretation of the past in the present is a hybrid and malleable relation, with flows of heterogeneous private materials [27]. Everything remains and everything changes in the process of recovering rural materiality. It is possible to suggest a material permanence in the context of multiple (individual) moments [51]. Through experimental materiality, it is possible to establish paths of progress that connect with a new humanism or with sophisticated formulations of sociocultural turn in rural geography.

### **5. Recover the Material Loss of Rural Decay and the Emergence of New Experimental Materialities**

Decay is associated with the logic of loss or with the logic of rebirth and renewal [27]. In certain places, the ruin has affected the aesthetic value; while in others natural processes have returned to a stage prior to the cultural landscape [52]. If heritage is produced in the present, its relationship with the past has a clear temporality and spatial experience [42,43]. Micro-spaces emerge from the key social discourses and material constitutions of given assemblages of power [27].

Heritage is a permanent subjective and cultural process, where identities are created and contested, at different scales [43]. There is a popular vision that reflects aspects of heritage by offering alternative narratives [53] and an institutionalized or hegemonic vision integrated into political agendas. The lost heritage is also a loss of county life. The lost paradise of the traditional countryside suggests a new awareness of the selective recovery of (new) rural materialism. The reconstruction of a place allows for making a new visible community [26]. Social change produces new material and visible communities and the new visible communities reinforce the process of change.

The reconstruction of rural houses is a particular example traditionally associated with the interests of the 'fashionable folk' [54]. More recently, the purchase and rehabilitation of traditional houses in order to use them for recreational amenities has been a remarkable way of investing money in the new urban middle class. The rehabilitation and use of traditional rural housing, one of the main components of rural heritage, is a prestigious factor in contemporary Western societies. Old and new make up a renovated and differentiated hybrid rural community that has a fluid material expression in the recovery of rural houses. If the rural community is a plurality of individuals, the architectures express and integrate that social plurality in the process of experimental recovery of the place.

The recovery process of a rural house simultaneously establishes the logic of resistance and the logic of commoditization. The logic of resistance evokes the continuity of cultural materiality in form of a traditional house while the logic of commoditization suggests a new functionality of the renovated rural house, dissociating with the old agrarian component. In addition, the traditional houses relate histories of individual human desires and a re-evaluation of the marginal past in the present. In the recovery process of the traditional rural houses, two phases have been established: the concern for the recovery of the artifact and the concern for maintaining the style in the recovery [36]. It is not about recovering materiality, but about recovering the quality and soul of materiality.

Recover the lost materiality is a form of experience past in present and material in human life, in definitive is the process of emergence of new hybrid and fluid experimental categories. In a locality, it is possible to find multiple and even individual styles of houses experiences of rural houses recover. A place contains different new and micro

experiences of recovering in the forms of ‘little tactics of the habitat’, in a context of a new heterogeneous space [55].

The recovery of the historical conditions of a place allows the emergence of new trajectories, associated with recreation or tourism. The conservation and preservation of natural and cultural heritage is always linked with the future [29,56]. Heritage is a re-enacted materiality in order to survive, with different levels of rarity. It is possible to suggest material resistances or heritage survivals of past rural environments. We constantly reform historical material sites or scenes as much as our memories. The fact it is being acted upon of course means that is subject to change. Cultural prejudices affect preservation, recovery or (functional) loss and possible destruction. Heritage allows associating heterogeneous human and non-human realities and actors and assembling different management practices and politics to design different strategies for the future [57,58]. These heterogeneous properties of heritage are assembled in the present to qualify the particular future of the place. There is a process of heritage experiences in the present context of the heritage site [59]. This is manifested in particular encounters between an exclusive and inclusive sense of identity and belonging [60].

Material processes encompass multiple or even infinite singular trajectories of change and experimental recovery [34]. There is a singular association to each heritage place between new materialism, memory and subjectivity. Materiality is not a fixed entity but establishes a dynamic relationship with other entities, in permanent more-than-human dialogue [56]. All loss material recovery processes operate on-site and off-site in the form of dynamic associations that generate a diversity of styles of new materialism [28]. The different views of heritage sites change in the form of stories that reflect a variety of local communities. In other words, there is a remarkable acceptance of the inevitability of change as a permanent process situated in the present. This situation has been interpreted as a process of adaptive release [61] where different phases around heritage are combined through time.

In the process of curation of materialities, binary contradictions established in the rigid framework of modernity [62] can be resolved and can be established flexible postmodern alternatives co-produced between people and materiality. From the perspective of the spatial turn, the space syntax has been suggested, which would have its main focus on the real space based on the built environment (mainly houses) [21], an orientation that is of interest in granting notable relevance to the materiality of the place in the experience of (everyday) social life. Wheeler [63] identifies productive nostalgia as a key element of the fluid nature of the perceptions of heritage and change of the local population to maintain the traditional characteristics of the locality. Nostalgia is an active element of social change.

Within the framework of architectural geography, it has been argued that buildings can be non-human narrators or architectures that speak [64]. Animal geographies have pointed out that non-humans can have subjectivities and agencies; non-human objects can express themselves through experiences of the human body. Inanimate narrators (materialities and objects as buildings) can be expressed by projecting human experience on the use of objects. The objects acquire affective, emotional, relational or sensual dimensions that are expressed through material encounters that involve different subjects, objects and experiences in the house's life [64]. Architecture would have affective and emotional dimensions derived from everyday practices [38]. In short, it is proposed to dissolve the building-object in human practices and experiences, in the context of the materialist approaches of human-building fluid and hybrid. Thus, it is necessary to consider the idea of a house as a living being [64], that is born, grows, needs care and generates emotions, but that may also have its decline and even abandonment. The history of a rural house reflects the history of the family over time [36]. From a critical point of view on architectural geography, Goss [65] suggests four theoretical dimensions for the study of buildings: cultural artifacts, objects of value, signs and a spatial system [65]. These categories are of special interest for the historic preservation of popular rural houses and the emblematic rural heritage, since they make it



possible to consider buildings as commodities associated with social values and meaning incrustated in the spatial context.

This orientation will allow the establishment of new paths and connections through non-human narration about thoughts, experiences and feelings, within the framework of geo-ethnographic research on the life of houses and the architectures of lived experience [64]. Architects are mediators between the new materialism and the experimental need of the (new) owner.

Spain is a good example of the role of materiality in rural change processes due to the age of buildings in rural places under 2000 inhabitants –21.4% prior to 1900 and 38% prior to 1940-, that in many cases have had multiple, particular and parallel processes of loss and recovery. The context of population loss and the disruption of traditional farm households have had a notable impact on the availability, conservation and appreciation of rural houses. Emigrants usually retain the property of the family house and return seasonally [66].

The beginning of the recovery process of the new rural materialism can be placed in the Abandoned Villages Recovery Program for educational purposes in 1984 in Umbralejo (Guadalajara province), Bubal (Huesca province) and Granadilla (Cáceres province) [67]. They are towns abandoned by their inhabitants that were recovered in their materiality for educational purposes but without permanent inhabitants. The spirit of the new materialism survives through traditional architectural resistance. Currently, a new dimension of the theme is 'The most beautiful towns in Spain', an association that since 2011 promotes and preserves the quality of the architectural and urban heritage of rural areas and that currently has more than a hundred associated towns [68]. These two different realities of recovering the village coincide spatially. A good example is the recovered town of Umbralejo and the pretty town of Valverde de the Arroyos in Guadalajara province. Of these two neighboring municipalities, the first is abandoned and lives in the spirit and traditional values of its architecture, while the second is a living town recovered experimentally in its architecture by its inhabitants, with an individual and overall design that respects traditional architecture. The two municipalities are located in an area that has its main sign of identity in the traditional black slate architecture, the surface material on which it sits. If the community is a plurality of people, architectures express and integrate that plurality in a certain material form and place.

The (micro)experimental materiality reflects familiar (or even individual) rural houses' experiences in the lifecycle. It is possible to establish four main categories: (1) recovery of rural houses to establish rural businesses. The promoters can be indigenous to the area, which usually coincides with the rehabilitation of inherited village houses, or they can be newcomers who acquire a house and rehabilitate it in an attractive place for business and to start a new life [69]. (2) Returnees to the countryside who rehabilitate an inherited house and adapt it to new (urban) living standards. The recovery process of the rural house and its duration is conditioned by economic factors. (3) Newcomers with an urban origin that rehabilitate a traditional house for a new life in a new materialism [70–72]. They usually find the place after a systematic search process. The search for the place and the traditional house is simultaneous. (4) Rehabilitation of a family home that has always remained open, but that is updated to new needs and regulations. Some texts by architects specialized in rural rehabilitation suggest many keys: 'But in the large number of rural houses that live in these parts. Although these buildings were originally built as farmhouses, today we can see how some have exchanged sickles for beds, becoming domestic residences ...' [73]. The combination of the four types described in one place suggests oriented styles of the experimental plural recovery.

## 6. Conclusions

The analytical nature of contemporary rural geographic research has obscured some areas of work that can acquire considerable relevance in a re-evaluation of the processes of change in rural spaces that encompass stages of decline, transformation and re-emergence. The (re) consideration of new materialism as the starting point of rural spaces may offer new

possibilities for analytical progress in rural studies that have not been sufficiently explored. In this perspective, some arguments from the new historical and cultural geography may be useful in the revision of the processes of rural change based on the management of new materialism. The new rural materialism suggests styles of differentiation and styles of resistance of places, but it also contributes to reinforcing hegemonic constructions of space. The insertion of the new materialism in rural areas would be carried out through three planes: surface or matter locality that corresponds to the traditional elements of the rural space; materiality that would be based on an undifferentiated reading of the human artifacts in a village and finally a key geographical experimental materiality with an individual dimension, which express multiple and parallel reconstruction processes in a place.

It is about providing an alternative perspective based on new experimental materialism and natural and cultural heritage that allows reinterpreting the process of transformation of rural areas, especially in the most remote areas [74,75]. The new rural materialism is mainly based on a re-emergence of popular housing and a concern for other accessory buildings or traditional rural routes. The material process of recovery suggests infinite trajectories of change and experimental recovery. Recovering materiality back in the study of rural spaces is an option that can help to revitalize geographic analysis. It is possible to think of three models of advanced restructured rural areas: (1) closed-in social composition and renovate houses, (2) open for gentrification processes and (3) mix (seasonal and weekend). The problem at the moment is how to analyze the rural dynamics of the restructured world with classic arguments and points of view, which originated in the 1990s.

Usually, the binary point of view suggests two rural faces while the fluid one allows one common phase and envisions an integrative common policy [76,77]. As suggested by Cresswell [78] (p. 83) 'research on the place-making strategies of relatively powerless people at a micro-level is an effective use of the idea of place'. Place as the home is an idea in the post-structural theorizations of hybrid identities. In recent social and cultural geographies, an extensive body of work has analyzed more-than-human-materialist approaches and realities to making sense of the world and examined the agencies and different roles of socio-cultural landscapes [79,80]. In short, there is a parallel evolution from binary to fluid and structural to post-structural. In the context of the post-structural materiality relational turn, the different (new) materialist relational approaches appear under different names.

One of the options to integrate new materialism in the processes of rural change is through the successive processes of recovery and leave of the renovated heterogeneous rural materials, mainly rural houses. The new materialism reflects familiar rural houses experiences in the lifecycle. It is possible to establish four categories that determine oriented styles of experimental recover at place: recovery of rural houses to establish rural businesses; returnees to the countryside who rehabilitate an inherited house and adapt it to new (urban) living standards; newcomers with urban origin that rehabilitate a traditional house for a new life; rehabilitation and updating of a rural family house that has always remained open.

But beyond rural housing, we can think of different forms of material relations [81], such as those established between lost and forgotten rural (im) materialism and renew old rural materialism. The process of rural change abandons some territories and incorporates others at different scales, the result of the interaction between different elements. A recent study orientation in rural geography is the analysis of landscape biographies in the form of ancient and even lost micro spatial histories of rural and agrarian materialities. They would be the other (im) materialisms in the process of rural change that generate other marginal environmental histories of hybrid landscapes [81,82].

In definitive, the two circuits of old/new materialism, are clearly two different circuits, but with some complementary visions of the place: old materialism to new materialism; lost to found; forgotten to recover; nostalgia to (re)materialized; memory to reality.

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